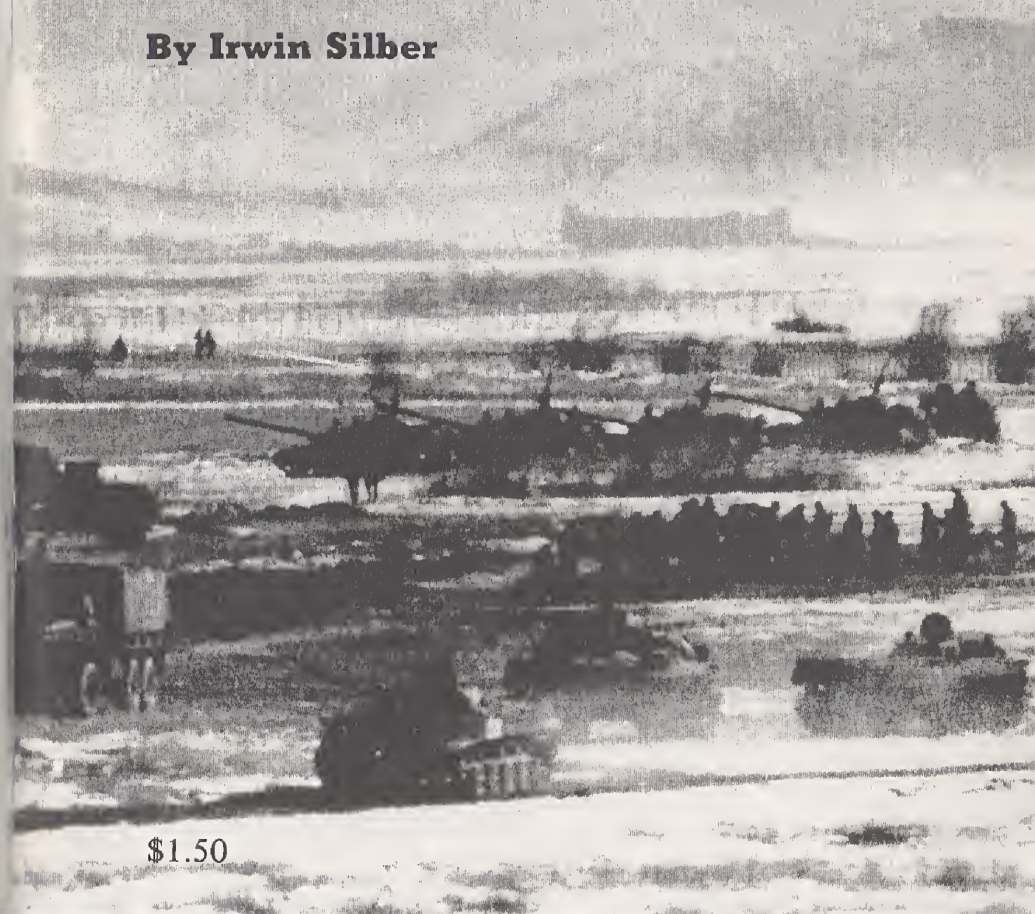


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# **Afghanistan— The Battle Line is Drawn**

**By Irwin Silber**



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## INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in Afghanistan impact the U.S. revolutionary movement at a fragile moment in its history. While U.S. imperialism is becoming increasingly aggressive around the world and stepping up attacks against the working class within this country, the mass anti-imperialist movement is at an ebb and the working class lacks a vanguard revolutionary party to provide clarity and direction to the mass struggle. Indeed, U.S. Marxist-Leninists lack unity on a coherent and comprehensive international line to project before the U.S. working class, and remain defined largely by their rejection of the non-revolutionary line of modern revisionism, headquartered in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and their recent demarcation from the class collaborationist line headquartered in the Communist Party of China.

Under such circumstances, it is tempting for anti-imperialists and Marxist-Leninists to try to avoid a complex problem such as that posed by events in Afghanistan. Arguments are made that intense struggle over such a question would only further divide the ranks of genuine revolutionary forces; that taking a firm stand on Afghanistan might threaten the movement's delicate ties to the broad masses; even that too much attention is given to international issues preventing revolutionaries from getting down to the "real work" of organizing the U.S. working class around "its own" problems.

Yet this approach is exactly the opposite of what is needed. The very complexity of the international problem requires that Marxist-Leninists give it all the more attention. The use being made of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan by U.S. imperialism requires that Marxist-Leninists express a clear and firm view opposed to U.S. imperialism before the masses, and it is precisely because differences exist, that rigorous and thorough struggle over them must receive the highest priority.

It is only this orientation to the various political and theoretical questions that confront the working class that will enable U.S. Marxist-

Leninists to lead our movement out of its present state of confusion. It is only through rigorous struggle that firm unity on international line and other aspects of a general revolutionary line be built. And it is only when unity on line is achieved, that U.S. Marxist-Leninists will be able to unite in a single vanguard party able to function as the advanced detachment of the U.S. working class.

In our view, this orientation is expressed concretely in the call for U.S. Marxist-Leninists to build a broad rectification movement to review the history of the U.S. working class movement, examine the concrete conditions of the world situation today and the particularities of the U.S., and forge a correct general line for the U.S. communist movement. Such a rectification movement must take up every political and theoretical question posed by the class struggle as it unfolds, even when events interrupt the neat and well-laid plans and agendas of Marxist-Leninists for theoretical work.

The rapid developments in the Afghan revolution confront U.S. communists with such questions. We publish this pamphlet as a contribution to answering the questions posed by this particular situation and as a contribution to the rectification movement in general.

Editorial Board  
Line of March  
A Marxist-Leninist Journal of  
Rectification

Every revolution has bound up within it, to a greater or lesser degree, the principal questions of our historical epoch. In the final analysis, these questions come down to the contradiction between the dying imperialist system and those who objectively stand in opposition to it: the proletariat, oppressed peoples and nations, socialism.

Each revolution has its particularity, that set of unique conditions which give shape and form to the revolutionary struggle of the masses and determine the particular course of their revolution. But each revolution likewise has its universality in that it reflects, is a part of, and affects the main revolutionary direction of our epoch.

The revolutionary struggle of the people of Afghanistan, then, must be viewed in this dual context: its particularity in terms of the class contradictions within Afghanistan and its intersection with the overall development of world events.

In the recent period, the Afghan revolution reached a critical turning point. Significant gains registered since revolutionary forces came to power in April 1978 were seriously threatened by the growth of a counter-insurgency launched by reactionary class elements in Afghanistan and supported by agents and allies of U.S. imperialism. The very question of who would hold state power in Afghanistan was being posed by the rapid development of events.

In these circumstances, the Soviet Union intervened with sizeable military forces and secured a new government in Kabul with the aim of defeating the counter-revolution both politically and militarily. Moscow's interest in the outcome of the struggle in Afghanistan was clearly conditioned principally by its concern that this neighboring country should not be utilized by imperialism to pose a threat to the USSR's national security.

U.S. imperialism has responded to the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan with the promotion of an atmosphere of international crisis and the promulgation of what is now being called the Carter Doctrine. This doctrine declares the area of the Persian Gulf one of such vital interest to the security of the U.S., that "any means necessary, including military force," will be employed to preserve the status quo there. The Carter Doctrine was accompanied by a rash of other moves all designed to show that U.S. imperialism means business. Among these moves are the



cancellation of grain sales to the Soviet Union, resumption of massive military assistance to Pakistan, the granting of China "most favored nation" trade status and permitting the sale of war-related materials to the People's Republic, a 12% increase in the U.S. military budget, the lifting of "restraints" on the CIA, and the re-establishment of a mechanism for the military draft. And in order to dramatize the "seriousness" of it all, President Jimmy Carter has initiated a moral crusade for either a cancellation or a boycott of the Olympic Games scheduled to be held in Moscow this summer.

What is the significance of these events? What stand should Marxist-Leninists take toward them?

Although the principal attention of U.S. Marxist-Leninists must be devoted, at this time, to the complex tasks associated with the re-establishment of a genuine revolutionary party of the working class, this activity does not take place within a vacuum. The world of politics and the class struggle is continually thrusting before us new tasks and responsibilities, of both a theoretical and practical nature. Much of our party building efforts become framed and defined in relationship to such developments. Consequently, it is necessary to advance our views, struggle for unity on line and orientation, and help clarify these pressing questions before our movement. This is the pre-condition in any meaningful way in the broader political process.

Clearly the recent events surrounding Afghanistan throw up before us the questions of war and peace, the course of the struggle against U.S. imperialism, and the role of the USSR in world politics. Our efforts to analyze, respond and practically intervene in a timely, clear-cut and decisive fashion will contribute to forging a general line for the U.S. communist movement, so necessary for the successful re-establishment of a Marxist-Leninist party.

The methodology employed in this paper will be to locate the events in Afghanistan first in their overall world context, examining in particular the role and stand of the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and then to offer a concrete analysis of the course and development of the revolution in Afghanistan. The question will be taken up then, in the following three aspects:

1. The role and policy of the U.S., in particular the significance of the enunciation of the Carter Doctrine, in light of the general crisis of the imperialist system.

2. The role and policy of the Soviet Union, in particular the significance of its military intervention in Afghanistan, in light of the general line guiding the work of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

3. The revolutionary struggle in Afghanistan, in particular the course of events from April 1978 to February 1980.

In addition, we will contrast our own views to the views of some forces

on the U.S. left who speak in the name of Marxism-Leninism, in particular those of the "left" opportunists, as well as, certain forces within the anti-revisionist, anti-"left" opportunist party building movement.

## ROLE AND POLICY OF THE U.S.

Perhaps the underlying significance of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan is to be found primarily in U.S. imperialism's reaction to it.

At first glance, the outburst of hysteria in Washington, capped by President Carter's grim-faced State of the Union message announcing the Carter Doctrine, seems incongruous. Afghanistan is halfway around the world from the U.S., and shares a lengthy border with the Soviet Union. In terms of superpower politics alone, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan would appear to be no more a threat to relations between the U.S. and the USSR than the U.S. intervention was in the Dominican Republic back in 1965 in order to prevent the triumph of what was seen as another "Cuban-type" revolution. Surely, the U.S. ruling circles did not really expect that Moscow would sit idly by and permit what would inevitably have been an anti-Soviet regime come to power in Kabul, while the U.S. and China are in the process of developing a political/military alliance against the USSR and the Iranian situation is extremely unstable and volatile. This would mean forces hostile to the USSR across its entire southern border!

In addition, the hysteria depicting Afghanistan as the Soviet Union's stepping stone to pounce upon the oil fields of the Persian Gulf area is more wild speculation than informed political realism. First of all, it is wishful thinking to project the very real oil supply crisis facing imperialist countries onto the USSR. All indications are that the Soviet Union is in possession of vast oil and fuel reserves still untapped and undeveloped. Equally important, no one, least of all the leaders of the Soviet Union, are foolish enough to doubt for a moment that any substantial Soviet move into Iran, Saudi Arabia or any other major oil producing nation of the Middle East would provoke a quick U.S. military response.

In the jingoistic atmosphere now engulfing Washington, there were few who dared voice the obvious. Republican presidential contender, Congressman John Anderson of Illinois, however, was one. Anderson called Carter's outburst "a deliberate political hype . . . Carter," he said, "has cynically taken advantage of what he knows is that attitude of fear in the minds of many people." *Pravda* could never have expressed it any clearer!

Historical parallels are never exact, but increasingly it seems clear that the Afghanistan coup has been chosen as Carter's "Gulf of Tonkin." To refresh our memories could prove a timely political exercise. In August 1964, Lyndon Johnson reported that North Viet-



namese gunboats had fired on a U.S. ship in the Gulf of Tonkin. Immediately thereafter, Congress voted to grant the President emergency war powers enabling Johnson to qualitatively increase U.S. involvement in Vietnam without further congressional approval. In the accompanying hysteria, there was virtually no congressional opposition and "the U.S. public was" successfully duped. Years later, it was fairly conclusively demonstrated that the whole incident was a hoax. Has the Carter administration created its own foreign affairs crisis as a pretext for a major alteration in policy?

One commentator whose anti-Soviet credentials are impeccable, former U.S. Ambassador to Moscow George F. Kennan, was visibly dismayed by the Carter reaction. "In the official American interpretation of what occurred in Afghanistan," noted Kennan (*N.Y. Times*, February 1, 1980), no serious account appears to have been taken of such specific factors as geographic proximity, ethnic affinity of peoples on both sides of the border and political instability in what is, after all, a border country of the Soviet Union. Specific factors of this nature, all suggesting defensive rather than offensive impulses may not have been all there was to Soviet motivation, nor would they have sufficed to justify the action; but they were relevant to it and should have been given their due in any realistic appraisal of it."

Kennan's sobering conclusion contains a warning: "Never since World War II has there been so far-reaching a militarization of thought and discourse in the capital."

### SIGNIFICANCE OF U.S. POLICY SHIFT

What's so significant about Carter's foreign policy shift anyhow? Certainly we all recognize the fact that U.S. imperialism is prepared to ultimately defend its fundamental interests with force, especially its vital need for long range oil supplies. Unfortunately, those who argue thus are merely contenting themselves with platitudes and left phrase-mongering in a period which demands concrete and detailed political analysis. For well over a decade, U.S. imperialism was increasingly reluctant to pose itself as the policeman and bully for the world capitalist system. Its political and military capacities were no longer viewed as invincible, as it was beset on all sides by revolutionary struggles of oppressed peoples and nations in its desperate war of survival. In short, U.S. imperialism had no choice but to begin to accommodate its policies to the altering balance of political forces in the world. But the on-going debate within imperialist ruling circles has centered around the question, is there too much accommodation, should force be reasserted before it is too late?

We are in fact witnessing a significant shift in U.S. imperialism's foreign policy, ushering in a mounting warlike political climate both internationally and domestically. It behooves us as Marxist-Leninists to carefully trace the development of this shift as it has unfolded over the past few years. If we recall, the Nixon administration attempted to frame

a new policy solution to the dilemma inherited from the Kennedy/Johnson policy of large scale and direct U.S. military involvement in Indochina. The Nixon Doctrine, coined as "Vietnamization," amounted to having Asians fight Asians, Africans fight Africans, Latins fight Latins—letting the imperialists reap the benefits as peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America chalk up the battlefield casualties. This despicable policy was calculated to take full advantage of the long standing traditions of national chauvinism and racism in imperialist countries. Unfortunately, for the imperialists, the policy of "Vietnamization" proved a bit too simplistic, and a bit too late to forestall the deepening crisis. The dramatic collapse of the Thieu army in 1975 marked the turning point and undoubtedly prompted the clamoring for a new "hard line policy" within the chambers of the Pentagon and the State Department.

But such policies are not scrapped overnight, especially when imperialist options are narrowing year by year. In the Middle East, of course, the Nixon Doctrine translated itself into "Let Muslims fight Muslims." In the Persian Gulf area, the Shah of Iran was tapped to play the role of Nguyen van Thieu. From 1971 on, the Shah's repressive government became the strategic linchpin designed to look out for U.S. interests in the Middle East. All things considered, the Shah did reasonably well. He continued to supply oil to Israel when all other sources had dried up. He sent Iranian troops to suppress the internal rebellion in Oman when that reactionary sultanate was on the verge of being overthrown. He was a moderating force in OPEC where he did his best to keep oil prices at an acceptable level. In order to consolidate this role, there was a powerful build-up of Iran's military arsenal during the 1970's. It began to tower over its neighbors and stood as a grave warning to all those who would plot against the best interests of imperialism in the region. Indeed, a mighty friend was the Shah of Iran. Of course, the fatal flaw of the Nixon Doctrine was that the people of Iran did not consider the Shah their friend, as they were to display a few years later.

The U.S. political and military debacle in Indochina was followed close on the heels by the liberation of Mozambique and the civil war in Angola. The imperialists experienced the greatest moment of frustration in Angola when the Soviet Union and Cuba helped the MPLA to secure its revolutionary victory while the U.S. could do little more than gnash its teeth at its own impotence.

In this part of the world, the battlelines were drawn too sharply, too clearly; the U.S. imperialists had a difficult time marshalling black Africans to fight black Africans. The pro-U.S. "liberation organizations" could not be cloaked with any credibility; they stood nakedly as mercenaries with links to the CIA and South Africa. At home, the U.S. policy



makers found an equally untenable political situation. Any attempt to dispatch black GI's to Africa to fight shoulder to shoulder with South African racists would border upon political insanity—it would raise much more than eyebrows in the black communities. Because the memory of the Indochina war was still too vivid in the minds of the American people, another “colonial war” in Africa would be hard to sell. Their hands tied politically, the imperialists had to sit this one out. For the U.S. imperialists the realization was sobering—in Africa they had the millstones of South Africa and Rhodesia around their neck; in the Middle East, the millstone of Israel. With such a heavy load it was extremely difficult to either “walk softly” or “carry a big stick!”

### “NEVER AGAIN”

Despite this predicament, the bitter taste of the Angolan revolution left the imperialists epithet “never again” on their lips. Since 1976, the U.S. government has been more consciously seeking a basis for sufficiently changing the climate of the world and domestic public opinion so as to remove the spectre of Vietnam and once again provide U.S. imperialism the flexibility with which to confront as well as concede. This throws a new light on interpreting many of the events and developments of the last few years: Carter's unending crusade for “human rights” in the Soviet Union, the carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign depicting massive increases in Soviet military strength, the speed-up in U.S./China normalization, etc. Each of these contributed something to the gradual change in the political climate, but none were able to provide the U.S. government with the free hand it sought.

Several events in 1979 made the dilemma facing imperialism's strategists even more urgent: the revolutionary upheaval in Iran; the Vietnamese intervention in Kampuchea followed by China's poor military showing in its attempt to “punish” Hanoi; the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua; and the increasing instability of the capitalist economy highlighted by the growing inflation and the weakening of the U.S. dollar. One need not be a capitalist to appreciate somewhat their growing predicament and imagine the rumblings in the top circles of the imperialist system . . . “We have to take firm steps to stabilize this deteriorating situation.” In 1979, a campaign for the political and ideological re-conditioning of the masses was more actively promoted. The overthrow of the Shah was followed by another manufactured gasoline shortage with the accompanying sky-rocketing prices for motor fuel and heating oil. But while this produced howls of protest from the public, the effort partially backfired to a certain extent as the oil companies were caught once again extracting record breaking profits. Although the American people were encouraged, with some success, to associate the Iranian revolution with higher gas and oil prices, this was not

sufficient to engender any widespread public sympathy for the deposed Shah. His crimes were far too numerous to hide or gloss over. Any talk of direct U.S. intervention would still not have met with substantial public support.

The Vietnamese intervention in Kampuchea was again followed by an all-out anti-communist propaganda blitz and slander campaign against Vietnam. Horror stories about imminent starvation in Kampuchea replete with Rosalyn Carter's “mercy mission,” the plight of the boat people, the ruthless aggressiveness of Hanoi with the hovering presence of Moscow in the background, were all conjured up to paint the false image of a Vietnamese communist spectre threatening to gobble up the “democracies” of Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and even wild enough to invade China! A considerable amount of emotion was expended in this process, but the political results still left a lot to be desired from the point of view of the imperialists.

For one thing, it was hard to generate much sympathy for the Pol Pot regime whose unsavory record has been so well documented that even his most ardent supporters must dwell on other matters in defending the overthrown regime. Besides, the conflict in Kampuchea was generally viewed as a “squabble among communists.” Kampuchea had already been given up as lost to imperialist control and penetration; Americans could not be convinced that Kampuchea was vital to the U.S. national security—it's a long way from the oil wells of the Middle East. The majority of the Vietnamese boat people turned out to be either those who weren't able to catch the last U.S. helicopter out of Saigon back in 1975 or petty capitalists and black marketeers—not exactly the self-sacrificing, “freedom loving” types. Most important, however, was the fact that the memory of the war fought in Indochina was too vivid in the consciousness of the U.S. masses.

Then, lo and behold, U.S. imperialism's self-proclaimed “backyard” exploded with revolution. The Sandinista victory in Nicaragua swept away Somoza through armed struggle and popular uprising. Somoza was Latin America's version of the Shah of Iran, and no one would touch him with a ten-foot pole much less rise to his defense. The U.S. could not even maneuver the OAS to intervene. The Sandinista Front, with Marxist-Leninists at its center, could not easily be duped or co-opted. The Nicaraguan situation had far too many similarities to the Cuban situation in the early 60's for the comfort of the U.S. imperialists, yet they lacked a clear enough justification for intervention. In search of a pretext, the U.S. announced the “belated discovery” of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba. Not surprisingly, the Ronald Reagan types were on their feet calling for another U.S. invasion of Cuba . . . and Nicaragua while we're at it. (Also, not surprisingly, the ultra-leftists came out to serve as the cheering gallery.) The Cubans, however, calmly informed



the world that the Soviet brigade had been there since the missile crisis of 1962 and they were staying put. The Soviet chimed in "that's right," and the imperialist pretext sank like a lead balloon as planeloads of Cuban doctors, teachers and engineers began to arrive in Managua.

Then came the incident of the Shah's cancer and the seizure of the U.S. hostages in Tehran. One cannot say for sure what goes on in the minds of those who decide such things, but the explanation that permitting the Shah to come to the U.S. for medical treatment was a "miscalculation" is becoming increasingly dubious. The special pleading done on behalf of the Shah by his powerful friends at the Chase Manhattan Bank—David Rockefeller and Henry Kissinger—makes it clear that political innocence and humanitarianism can hardly have been the principal factor in this decision. Rockefeller, Kissinger and Carter were dispatching a signal to every fascist dictator propped up by the U.S. in the world that they would not be forgotten in their "hour of need."

Placing aside the political and tactical wisdom of the Iranian students' seizure of the American hostages, the U.S. imperialists have grabbed the opportunity to fan the flames of American jingoism and national chauvinism. From abusive attacks on Iranian students in the U.S. to the proliferation of "Nuke the Ayatollah" T-shirts and buttons, an ugly and warlike atmosphere of jingoism, reminiscent of the early 1950's, has begun to gain substantial ground among the American people. For the first time there was installed a significant enough rightward shift in the political climate of the country to justify a formal turn toward the more hard line military foreign policy which the imperialists have been mandating for some time. The mounting talk of war and confrontation coincides with the deepening problems of inflation, "planned" recession and reduced social services.

In summary, in 1979, U.S. imperialism paved the way for a major policy reversal—"putting Vietnam behind us"—that would enable it to deal more effectively with the rising challenge to its system internationally and to defuse and divert the mounting popular discontent at home toward the "glories" of war and the "necessity" of economic privation for the sake of "God, country and the American way of life."

However, to sustain such a political climate requires a perceived threat and a sense of ideological purpose. To set the U.S. on an indefinite war footing merely to "defend America" from the Ayatollah Khomeini promises only momentary success, especially once the hostages are actually released. The imperialists needed to drag the old "Soviet menace" back onto the center stage and throw a red spot light on it once again. The Soviets however, have been extremely reluctant and careful not to assume such a role. They have successfully managed to keep a sufficiently low profile in all the hot spots where the U.S. has experienced reversals—Iran, Nicaragua, Angola, etc. Carter was in search of sufficient political leverage to usher in the revival of the "cold

war" and the scrapping of SALT II. However, this is easier wished for than accomplished. The 1980's are quite different than the 1950's—a cold war with the USSR flies in the face of common sense and the economic, political and military realities of international politics.

### "LET'S GO WITH AFGHANISTAN"

And so we had a new imperialist policy in search of an "incident" . . . and then came Afghanistan! In Washington, the decision was made to go all out. Perhaps domestic political considerations played a role in it. Carter's political standing was so dismal that he had become fair game for political rivals in his own country—a somewhat unusual situation for an incumbent. Jingoistic appeals to patriotism always makes for some effective campaign ammunition in the short-run. But to note this is not to reduce the Afghanistan incident to a mere partisan political ploy. The point is that if Carter did not exploit this opportunity, his Republican rivals would have, so he could not afford to wait for a better pretext to come along.

On its own merits, using Afghanistan as the excuse for a drastic change in U.S. policy had certain drawbacks. The country is not strategic to U.S. interests in its own right. Afghanistan is not an oil-producing nation nor is it the source of any other vital resource or product upon which the imperialist economy depends. Halfway around the world from the U.S., it is a little hard to imagine Soviet troops poised in Kabul ready for an assault on Washington, D.C. Politically, the U.S. can also not extend any official backing for the rebel forces without, at the same time, undercutting the argument about Soviet "intervention" in the sovereign affairs of Afghanistan.

However, Afghanistan also presented certain advantages for the purposes the U.S. imperialists had in mind. To begin with, Americans are grossly ignorant about Afghanistan's history and society, a fact the ruling circles have taken full advantage of. For example, its proximity to Iran has served to artificially transfer to Kabul much of the popular concern rivited on Tehran, obscuring in an atmosphere of generalized political anxiety the distinctions between the two societies. Similarly, because Afghanistan is in the Middle East, it translates in the minds of many Americans as "oil" and with it the fear that if the "Russians take over," it will further shrink the supply and raise gas prices. More importantly, the Soviet military intervention was direct and massive enough that it could not be hidden. The imperialists were quick to point out that this was the first time Soviet troops have moved outside of the circumscribed Soviet camp since World War II. All the allegations reserved for the U.S. could now be hurled back at the Soviets—aggressors, colonizers, even ill-founded attempts to accuse the Soviets of My Lai-type burnings of Afghan villages, raping women, killing children, etc. In addition, the current president, Babrak Karmal, had spent the



previous period in Eastern Europe and apparently was brought back and installed by the Soviets. On the surface he appears to be a complete creation of the USSR, an unknown imposed upon the people of Afghanistan. In fact, Karmal is quite prominent inside Afghanistan. A founder of the People's Democratic Party (communist party), and for years the left's spokesperson in parliament, he has probably been, after Taraki, the most influential nationalist and communist leader in Afghanistan over the past 20 years. Lastly, the counter-revolutionary movement is based in backward rural areas utilizing traditional ties of religion, superstition and reactionary nationalism. Consequently, it has a superficial appearance of enjoying a "popular base."

But possibly, what tilted the balance for the imperialist chieftains was that they didn't know if a better chance would come along. One can well imagine the careful weighing of pros and cons in the inner recesses of the National Security Council before the final decision—"Let's go with Afghanistan"—was made. The President's State of the Union message became the forum for announcing to the world this important shift in U.S. foreign policy—the Carter Doctrine.

### THE CARTER DOCTRINE

What then is the significance of the "Carter Doctrine"? The following would appear to be the most important features:

- It is the inevitable response to the "loss" of Iran as U.S. imperialism's most reliable and best equipped gendarme in the Middle East. The imperialists are hopeful that Egypt can eventually come to fill that role, but it will take some time. Sadat's credentials are tarnished after he openly broke the ranks of Arab unity on the central question of Israel and Palestine. Egypt's location is not as favorable as Iran for the purposes of imperialist geopolitics; and domestically, Egyptian society is a powderkeg. Israel, of course, is completely out of the question. The imperialists have all they can do to keep in check the wild ambitions of the Zionists to incorporate into Israel's borders any place even remotely mentioned in the Old Testament! The threat to Middle East oil—a threat which, as Iran clearly demonstrates, comes primarily from the revolutionary struggles of the masses and not from the Soviet Union—is one for which the U.S. must now assume direct and open military responsibility. The Carter Doctrine announces this to the world and prepares the people of the U.S. for the possibility of military intervention, anywhere in the Middle East where revolution threatens a pro-imperialist regime. As a leading analyst for the *New York Times* puts it (January 25, 1980): "The biggest question [concerning the Carter Doctrine] concerns the circumstances besides a Soviet invasion of Iran or other oil-producing nations, that might lead Mr. Carter to order military forces into the Persian gulf." (*Emphasis added—I.S.*)

- The way has now been paved for a U.S. military move in Iran. Such a move could take place fairly soon, but the greater likelihood is that Carter is readying world public opinion for intervention in the event that the present regime, whose ruling class alignments are extremely unstable, is brought down and there is a move to the left in Iran. This would be described as "internal subversion" that would benefit Moscow and jeopardize world peace, and in light of the Carter Doctrine, could be deemed a strategic threat to U.S. security.

- Political and military alliances which were only recently considered taboo can now be pursued, in particular in the Middle East. Arms sales have been resumed to Pakistan and billions of dollars in military aid promised. The ban on aid to Turkey has been lifted. U.S. military equipment and technology can now be sold to China, which has made abundantly clear its commitment to maintain the status quo in the Middle East in order to check Soviet designs. Clearly in a "national crisis," the U.S. can't be expected to be as fussy about its allies, and support to reactionary and racist regimes can be less covert than in the past. (Ronald Reagan has already called for imposing a blockade on Cuba in response to Afghanistan, a classic example of the ideological bias at the heart of imperialist logic which Reagan can always be counted on to expose.) However, in this day and age, Washington realizes it must cloak the Carter Doctrine in other language than openly declaring a "war on communism."

- The U.S. is trying to lay the foundation for an anti-communist ideological front in the Middle East based upon Islam. It hopes to capture the nationalist sentiment of the masses and direct it against the "atheistic" Soviet Union and away from U.S. imperialism. The abundance of reactionary class forces in the Middle East promises the imperialists considerable success in this scheme. However, as recent events have shown, the one thing which Muslim reactionaries hate as much as communism is Zionism. This is quite a pickle for the Carter Doctrine to attempt to get out of.

- Carter has restated U.S. imperialism's view of peaceful co-existence and détente. "It's just not fair!" bemoan the imperialists. The USSR has been breaking the "rules" and cheating and the U.S. refuses to continue playing the game if this doesn't stop immediately. To punctuate the point, the U.S. has tabled the ratification of SALT II indefinitely. What becomes crystal clear is that, from the imperialist point of view, peaceful co-existence/détente is an agreement to concede to socialism a certain sphere of influence for some indefinite period of time and allow a few "grey areas," provided the "socialists" co-operate in restraining revolution outside that sphere. The Soviets had previously indicated that they had abandoned Lenin's wild notion that the laws of the class struggle would bring the proletariat to power world wide, that



the USSR would help this process wherever and however it could, and that peaceful co-existence was a necessary tactical arrangement in pursuing this strategy. The U.S. is dramatically calling for an inter-

the Soviet court, a tense moment for the weak knees of modern revisionism.

- Lastly, the domestic political purposes of the Carter Doctrine are already clear. Having established a crisis atmosphere, restraints on the CIA and FBI are being lifted, the first step towards re-instatement of the draft has taken place, and military "defense" expenditures have jumped substantially without need for a detailed explanation, much less any Congressional or popular opposition and controversy. The green light has been given for cutbacks on people's welfare and standard of living, justified in the name of the common "sacrifice" required to meet the Soviet threat. Vietnam is "being put behind us" in an outburst of jingoism, racism and national chauvinism.

Underscoring this point was the *Wall Street Journal* (January 25, 1980). Hailing Carter for having "turned a corner on foreign policy" with his interdiction of the Persian Gulf area, the *Journal* congratulated the President particularly for picking "up a political hot potato in advocating resumption of draft registration. Opposition to the draft was at the very heart of the post-Vietnam syndrome, yet a serious society clearly needs to face the possibility that circumstances may arise that necessitate a conscript army. Mr. Carter deserves forthright support on this proposal, both as an eminently practical step, and as a symbol of national recovery from the trauma of Vietnam."

In summation, while the present crisis has, to a great extent, been manufactured by U.S. imperialism, the sense of panic which has been enveloping the U.S. ruling class ever since the end of the Vietnam war is certainly real enough, as are the contradictions ripening within the imperialist system. The course already charted by the revolutionary peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America in resolving these contradictions has become unmistakably clear over the past couple of decades. Revolution is, indeed, the main trend in the world today.

## THE SOVIET ROLE

What has not always been so clear is the role which the Soviet Union intends to play as the world revolution proceeds. Let us turn, therefore, to examine the role and policies of the Soviet Union in the world today, particularly the developing Soviet view of what foreign policy will serve its interests best. In many ways, the current raging international controversy over Afghanistan is principally a reflection of how various forces view the real or perceived dangers (or benefits) posed by the Soviet Union in world politics.

In order to assess the actions of the USSR, one needs first to determine what kind of society it is and what general policy or line guides its development. This may appear to be a strange starting point. One would think that the nature of the USSR would be fairly evident by now, as well as understood as the international assessment of the character of the U.S. But this is not the case, and ironically, most of the confusion exists within the ranks of the international communist movement in the wake of the split over modern revisionism in the 60's. The contradictory policies and practices of the USSR over the years have fueled this confusion. We start then with the following opinion: a socialist system was established in the Soviet Union after the victory of the Bolshevik revolution. The development of socialism has been characterized by massive transformations in the forces of production and the class relations. The basic mode of production ushered in by the Bolshevik revolution remains unchanged, and still reflects, though highly imperfectly, the basic class interest of the Soviet proletariat. In short, despite serious shortcomings and deformations in the theory and practice of Soviet socialism, a capitalist counter-revolution has not been affected in the USSR. The empirically unsound and theoretically muddled "capitalist restoration thesis" is a "short cut" analysis which actually detours us from the more difficult task of analyzing the complex contradictions of Soviet socialism guided by a revisionist line.

The modern revisionist line centered in the CPSU is the ultimate source of the vacillation, opportunism and class collaboration which often characterizes the policies and practices pursued by the USSR. The cornerstone of the revisionist line can be seen in the controversy over the principal contradiction in the world today.

The fundamental contradiction of our epoch is the antagonism between two social systems—capitalism and socialism. The one is dying and the other is rising. The whole period, therefore, will inevitably be characterized by enormous social, political and economic turmoil and this will be expressed in a particularly high pitch of class struggle. This fundamental contraction manifests itself in three main forms:

- The contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat;
- The contradiction between oppressor (imperialist) nations and oppressed (exploited and subjugated) nations and peoples;
- The contradiction between imperialist countries and socialist countries.

In addition, the contradictions among the imperialist countries themselves continue to operate as a powerful force built into the very competitive nature of the capitalist mode of production.

In any given period, the fundamental contradiction of our epoch will manifest itself through the primacy of one of these contradictions. When the Communist Party of China was still guided by a Marxist-Leninist



general line, it argued correctly that the principal contradiction of the period is between imperialism led by U.S. capitalism on the one hand and the oppressed peoples and nations of the world on the other. This was an accurate summation of the actual state of the class struggle in the world, identifying that contradiction which was, and still is, most actively moving history forward. To assert this view was not to deny that the other contradictions existed or could, under other circumstances, emerge as the principal one. (Today, of course, the CPC has formally altered its position on that question, holding that the USSR is capitalist and that the principal contradiction in the world is the "inter-imperialist" contradiction between the U.S. and the USSR. Between the two, it considers the USSR as the rising, more aggressive imperialism, and calls for the formation of a tactical united front with U.S. imperialism while preparing itself frantically for World War III.)

On the other hand, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union holds that the contradiction between capitalist countries (headed by the U.S.) and socialist countries (headed by the USSR) is the principal contradiction in the world. The formulation "headed by the U.S. . . . headed by the USSR" is of crucial importance because, rhetoric aside, the line reduces itself to U.S./Soviet contention. This view represents a nationalist deviation from Marxism-Leninism which objectively subordinates the actual revolutionary struggles in the world to the narrower state interests of the Soviet Union. This Soviet view of the principal contradiction in the world led to the following estimate in 1956, and it still remains up until today the basic underpinning of the general line of the USSR: Since the imperialist camp holds a military edge over the socialist camp, it is in the interests of the socialist countries (therefore the world proletariat) to buy time from the imperialists through a policy of peaceful co-existence. This policy means that the imperialists should not be "provoked" in such a way as to embroil the Soviet Union in a direct military confrontation with the U.S. Instead, the CPSU should engage the imperialists actively in the process of peaceful co-existence, exploiting contradictions with the monopoly capitalist ruling class based on national rivalries as well as varying financial interests. To effect this general line, the CPSU developed an international foreign policy composed of the following elements:

- Revolutionary wars of national liberation should be "contained" to make sure that they do not embroil the USSR in a direct confrontation with U.S. armed might. Revolutionary forces must understand therefore that Soviet support will be limited and will depend first and foremost on the risk entailed.

- The doctrine of "peaceful transition" to socialism should be enunciated as the preferred policy of the communist parties, especially those of the advanced capitalist countries, thus reassuring the U.S. and

its allies that they would not be directly attacked in their own bailiwicks. This is particularly important in France, Italy and Japan where the existence of mass Communist parties pose serious concerns for the imperialists. (It should also be noted that none of these parties had to have their arms twisted to adopt this new line. In fact, the Italian CP had been urging such a line on the international movement even before Khrushchev announced it.) The line of the CPSU also reflects its estimate that proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries is not on the foreseeable historical agenda and that, therefore, the theoretical concession (i.e., advocating peaceful transition) constitutes a positive concession of no immediate consequence anyhow. Such a pragmatic approach to "shades of difference" is characteristic of opportunism.

- The USSR will busy itself engaging in peaceful competition with the west, promoting trade, cultural exchanges, cooperation in various scientific fields, etc., between the socialist countries and the imperialist countries in order to develop an atmosphere of peace that will isolate the hard-liners in the capitalist camp. Trade is seen as especially important since this gives certain sectors of the imperialists an economic stake in normal relations.

- The military forces of the socialist countries should be built up in order to close the arms gap. Nuclear disarmament, if it could be effected (a doubtful proposition) will be in the best interests of the Soviet Union since the military edge of the imperialists is primarily technological—especially in the nuclear arsenal.

## A REVISIONIST GENERAL LINE

The problem with this line of the CPSU is that in those situations where the momentary interests of the Soviet state come into contradiction with the interests of the revolutionary struggles of oppressed peoples and nations as they are actually appearing in the world, it serves to theoretically justify the subordination of the latter to the former. Further, it promotes an ideological degeneration in the world communist movement and elevates what at best could be seen as a dubious tactical concession to imperialism (revolution is not on the immediate agenda of the advanced capitalist countries) to a strategic principle. Finally, it sees the security of the USSR as resting more on its accommodation with imperialism than on the further triumph of the world revolution.

The ideological underpinning of this line is obviously not compatible with Marxism-Leninism. Lenin's analysis of imperialism is abandoned and instead the view is promoted that "a world without war" is possible even without the defeat of imperialism. The class struggle as the motor force of history is subordinated to the struggle for economic reforms;



instead, the course of history will be determined by the strength and fortunes of the Soviet Union. No longer are the communists in the world the "conscious element" of every struggle, that advanced detachment of the working class charged with the task of leading the proletariat to its historical revolutionary destiny. Instead of everything depending on the self-conscious action of the working class and oppressed peoples, the Soviet line reduces humanity's progress towards socialism to the formulation that "everything depends on peace."

Another aspect of the Soviet leadership's narrow view of its national security and the interests of the world revolution is their emphasis on assuring the pro-Soviet character of revolutionary forces whom they support—in some cases backing a bankrupt group whom they know to be relatively weak and not of vanguard calibre, but which is still more reliable in terms of following Soviet leadership. Such opportunism is nothing but a thinly veiled attempt to perpetuate the privileged position enjoyed by the CPSU in a flunkyist network of dependent revisionist parties. Of course, there are also times when the Soviets have little choice but to cooperate with genuine Marxist-Leninist parties which can neither be categorized as revisionist nor flunkyist. However, Soviet support to revolutionary struggles remains generally mixed, inconsistent, frequently vacillating, and laced with hegemonistic tendencies.

Nevertheless, despite the vacillation and class collaboration fostered by this revisionist line, the contradiction between socialism and capitalism is real. And the Marxist precepts on the nature of antagonistic class struggle simply can not be wished away by obscurantist theoretical formulations. Reality keeps constantly imposing itself upon the CPSU and the Soviet Union, modifying the most extreme features of its revisionist tendency towards collaboration with imperialism and keeping its opportunism largely within the realm of ideology and only inconsistently in the realm of politics.

In this sense, *détente* as an all-encompassing system of world-wide cooperation between the Soviet Union and the U.S. never really worked. It could not because the fundamental contradiction between socialism and capitalism keeps getting in the way. Despite lingering illusions, the Soviet leadership can never feel secure in its arrangements with the U.S., especially since imperialism remains a system that must expand or die. Objectively, therefore, the defense of socialism in the actual practice of the class struggle is much more reliably secured by revolutionary victories in other countries than by relying on the "rationality" of the imperialists. Therefore, the Soviet leadership frequently does support revolutionary struggle as a way to weaken its major foe—always carefully weighing the possible consequences if it should go too far in confronting the U.S. This somewhat schizophrenic Soviet policy frequently leads to incorrect stands. This is evidenced in the Soviet

recognition of the Lon Nol regime in Cambodia during the Indochina war, its betrayal of the Eritrean people's legitimate revolutionary struggle in the interests of securing its influence with what it sees as the more strategically important Ethiopian junta, and its willingness to support reactionary regimes in countries where the viable revolutionary movement leading the struggle is explicitly critical of modern revisionism and the CPSU.

Ideologically, the CPSU makes major negative concessions to the bourgeoisie—concessions which have a serious practical consequence internationally in that a number of communist parties adopt blatantly reformist general lines as the basis for the proletarian struggle in their own countries. In this sense, the CPSU must be held responsible for the political and ideological degeneration of the revisionist parties firmly under its sway, since its own abandonment of Marxism-Leninism has legitimized the surrender of proletarian revolution in this international trend. In turn, this ideological betrayal sows illusions among the masses on the nature of imperialism and the strategy needed for defeating it. Nevertheless, we witness the contradictory phenomena that in the actual political arena of the international class struggle, the USSR has, on a number of occasions, pulled back from the full application of its revisionist theory in practice. In many of the crucial confrontations with imperialism (i.e., Vietnam, Angola, Zimbabwe, Palestine, etc.), the Soviet Union winds up on the correct side of the barricades. No concrete analysis of the role of the USSR in international politics can ignore this fact or, on the other hand, praise it out of the context of the accompanying revisionist vacillations.

In brief, the CPSU does not operate in the world as a conscious revolutionary force. It constitutes the international headquarters for modern revisionism. It devises its international policies principally on the basis of that which best serves the national interests of the Soviet state, rationalizing this politically with the view that the principal contradiction in the world is between the imperialist countries headed by the U.S. and the socialist countries headed by the Soviet Union. However, being a socialist country, the interests of the Soviet state frequently intersect with the objective interests of the world proletariat. Therefore, the Soviet Union—while hardly the "reliable" ally of oppressed peoples as it proclaims itself to be—is ironically often the "natural" ally it claims to be.

This rather lengthy "prologue" is indispensable for any all-sided view of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. For whether spelled out or not, all views of the events in Afghanistan stem from either similar or contending assumptions about the major contending forces in the world and the Soviet Union's role within this struggle.

For instance, the indignation of the imperialists obviously does not emanate from some newfound enthusiasm for the "human rights" of the



Afghan masses. Clearly, the imperialists are disturbed by the results of this event and by its implications for the future. For the U.S., the USSR still represents the main symbol in theory and practice of the weakening and destruction of the capitalist system. This imperialist fear has a real material basis. International capital cannot flow freely into the vast Soviet Union and expand its profits at the expense of the Soviet proletariat. This holds true also for those socialist countries tied closely into the Soviet camp. The imperialists now have good reason to believe that this will soon hold true for Afghanistan. They are begrudgingly admitting already that it is only a matter of time before the Soviets will help to politically and economically consolidate Afghanistan's exit from the imperialist orbit. "Loss of more economic territory!" This is the only language the imperialists truly understand. To them, all the controversy over Soviet revisionism is just so much inter-communist squabbling. This should not surprise us. Being bourgeois, they have an ideological blind spot preventing their full appreciation of the importance of such a struggle.

Likewise, denunciation of the Soviet move by the heads of a large number of Islamic states is also based on a certain clear political assumption: namely, the ever-present spectre of social revolution in their own countries, and the fear that the Soviet Union would begin to step up its assistance to indigenous communists or rush in to consolidate a revolutionary regime should the communists come anywhere near taking power. Certainly the first fear is a real and ripening one. However, the fear of active Soviet assistance and encouragement is more a perceived threat than a real one. Neither the Soviet revisionists nor their revisionist counterparts in the Islamic world have yet distinguished themselves for vanguard leadership in advancing the proletarian class struggle.

## THE U.S. LEFT'S REACTION

Reactions on the left also proceed from an elaborate set of assumptions. If consistency were a trait that had some political merit in its own right, we should congratulate both the "left" opportunists, who faithfully adhere to China's view of world events, and the pro-Moscow revisionists, for whom the fount of political wisdom will remain evermore enshrined behind the walls of the Kremlin. The views of both are so predictable that one hardly needs to examine the particular arguments from one incident to another, knowing full well that the argumentation will be devised to suit the pre-ordained conclusions. Still flunkysism cannot by itself explain this phenomenon. There are a set of opportunist political assumptions underlying each of these positions.

The "left" opportunists, basing their position on the thesis that the Soviet Union is a capitalist, hold that the Soviet Union is the more dangerous and the more powerful superpower. They call for a united

front bringing together all who can be united against the Soviet Union. That such a front will not only include U.S. imperialism but will, under present circumstances, inevitably be dominated by it, does not seem to dampen the enthusiasm of these "communist" advocates in the slightest.

Therefore, any event which appears to strengthen the Soviet Union—directly or indirectly—is viewed with the greatest suspicion and, for the most part, condemned. Likewise, any move which seems to strengthen the resolve of the imperialists to stand up to the Soviet Union is seen as positive. Viewed from such a standpoint, the "enlightened" section of the U.S. bourgeoisie begins with Ronald Reagan and moves steadily to the right—at least in so far as foreign policy is concerned.

The "left" opportunists have, with unfailing unanimity, denounced the Soviet action in Afghanistan as but the latest and most reprehensible example of a grand Moscow design for the conquest of the world. Since this is now precisely the leading line of the chieftains of monopoly capital, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between the political positions of the extreme "left" and the extreme right in the U.S. Of course, the "left" opposes the USSR for being capitalist, while the right fears the USSR because it's communist—an unstable united front indeed! A graphic example of this confluence was provided when *The Call*, the organ of the Communist Party (ML), and the *New York Times*, the organ of the "responsible" sector of finance capital, carried the very same article by the very same author proclaiming the events in Afghanistan as the starting point for World War III. While the *Times* noted the author's journalistic activities for the *Christian Science Monitor*, it conveniently omitted his reportage on behalf of *The Call*. The point, however, is not so much the duplicity of these credits as it is the ease with which these "strange bedfellows" were able to be at home in each other's company. It is interesting to take note in passing of the political schizophrenia infecting these "left" groups as they affect a militant stance in the class struggle at home while the logic of their international line forces them into support for higher military appropriations and "defense measures." Presumably, they favor a "guns and butter" policy, but despite their political contortions, they cannot escape the fact that they are marching underneath an anti-communist banner.

The pro-Moscow revisionists, on the other hand, proceed from the same assumption that the leaders of the CPSU do. For them, whatever policy the government of the USSR decides is in its own best interest is simultaneously one that is in the best interests of the world proletariat. Any contradictions which may arise between the CPSU and other communist parties are inevitably resolved in favor of the Soviet view. Toeing the Moscow line, therefore, the CPUSA finds itself unconditionally defending the Soviet actions in Afghanistan while at the



same time pleading for the ratification of SALT II and the further development of détente. Incapable of developing an independent analysis and line, they anxiously wait for word from Moscow on how to extricate themselves from the obvious contradiction in their propaganda.

Then there is a whole sector of the broader left for whom "process" is more important than results. These range from pacifists for whom the employment of force indelibly compromises the objectives, to social democrats whose greatest concern is that actions such as those of Vietnam in Kampuchea, Cuba in Angola and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan "give socialism a bad name." Such petty bourgeois prejudices are attempts to take the class struggle out of socialism, to transform the life and death character of the struggle for socialism into a neat and orderly "striving."

Another prominent example of this petty-bourgeois point of view holds that "national sovereignty" is a principle so absolute that one socialist country should not send its forces into another even if the political situation is such that counter-revolution may triumph. (The more sophisticated expression of this same thesis generally tends to minimize the danger of a counter-revolutionary comeback or holds that resolving such a contradiction must be the sole responsibility of indigenous forces.) Such a position replaces politics with moralism. Marxist-Leninists must always inquire first and foremost—what are the class interests involved, how can the overall interests of the international proletariat be served? Marxism has always held that national sovereignty elevated to an absolute, universal principle is nothing but a narrow bourgeois prejudice. At different times and in different circumstances the class struggle might demand the rigorous defense of national sovereignty; at other times it might call for armies to cross borders and the dispatching of international volunteers; in some circumstances it might necessitate a policy of no open involvement. In short, communists offer no preconditions or guarantees to the international bourgeoisie concerning the means in which they will advance the class struggle.

The view we will advance here rejects many of these assumptions. To begin with, we reject the charge that the USSR is a capitalist country, much less a fascist country or the principal danger to the peoples of the world. On the other hand, the Soviet Union is far from the paragon of proletarian internationalism. The modern revisionist line centered in the CPSU fosters vacillation and class collaboration in the proletarian struggle. The narrow view of Soviet national interests is the principal factor in Soviet foreign policy, but to the extent that it coincides with their perceived national interests, the USSR is capable of assisting the advance of the world revolution. In principle we have no predetermined opposition stemming merely from the fact that Soviet troops crossed the border into Afghanistan. The central questions remain: Which class interests were strengthened by the Soviet move? Was the Afghan

revolution strengthened or weakened in the process? With this in mind, let us examine the events in Afghanistan more closely.

## HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN

For centuries Afghanistan has seemed to be a country relatively impervious to the main revolutionary currents of our epoch. A land-locked state in central Asia, Afghanistan drew the interest of large powers primarily as a strategic gateway on the road to larger imperialist conquests. Its mountainous terrain made foreign invasions more difficult, but it also impeded the unification of the country. This, in turn, tended to perpetuate a lengthy tradition of tribalism and the ideological backwardness associated with the feudal mode of production.

In the 19th century, Afghanistan was a continuing arena of contention between Britain and Russia. Ultimately, the British prevailed and Afghanistan, while nominally independent, was little more than a British protectorate which stood as a barrier between the Czar and the historic ambitions of his predecessors for Russian access to the Indian Ocean.

British dominance and the generally backward state of the Afghan economy kept the country relatively removed from the influence of the Russian Revolution after 1917. In the period between world wars, some minimal efforts towards economic modernization took place, but the changes were hardly qualitative. Even in the period after World War II when British influence was on the decline, Afghanistan remained pretty much locked into its legacy of poverty, illiteracy and economic backwardness. As western influence waned, an unspoken truce between the Soviet Union and the U.S. prevailed in which neither sought to intervene "unduly" in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Moscow made it clear that any attempt by the U.S. to bring Afghanistan more directly into its orbit would be met with a military response. At the same time, the Soviet leaders seemed satisfied to have Afghanistan stand, in its traditional role, as a "buffer" on its southern flank. From the narrow standpoint of military security, the status quo in Afghanistan was acceptable to Moscow.

Modernization was clearly on the agenda in Afghanistan but the national bourgeoisie was relatively weak and its interests clearly collided with those of the large landholders and local chieftains who utilized the hold of religion on the masses to maintain them in a state of backwardness.

After World War II, a comprador bourgeoisie tied to western imperialist interests began to develop and gain more strength. In this connection, it is noteworthy that one of the present leaders of the Afghan rebel forces, Syed Ishaq Gailani, head of the National Front for the Islamic Revolution in Afghanistan, was up until recently the proprietor of the Peugeot automobile dealership in Kabul.



Today, Afghanistan is a country of 18 million people; 80 percent residing in rural areas, most of whom are peasants and nomadic tribespeople. While an estimated 90 percent of the population (98 percent of women) are illiterate, the economic developments and advanced ideas of the "outside" world could not be kept permanently out of Afghanistan.

### THE AFGHAN LEFT

On January 1, 1965, Noor Mohammed Taraki and Babrak Karmal founded the People's Democratic Party (PDP) of Afghanistan. While not explicitly a Marxist-Leninist party, the PDP developed a Marxist-Leninist analysis of Afghanistan and envisioned a popular democratic regime based on the small working class and the large peasantry as the first revolutionary stage in moving the country step by step towards socialism. The party identified U.S. imperialism as the center of world reaction and saw their struggle as part of the worldwide struggle against imperialism.

The Afghan party appears to have been relatively undeveloped politically and organizationally in its early years. In general, it could be termed a pro-Soviet party. Within it two conflicting tendencies emerged fairly soon. One was headed by Karmal, the other by Taraki. A shepherd's son, well-known as a poet and journalist in Afghanistan, Taraki was the more significant figure. He became the party's first secretary-general and a majority of the PDP followed his leadership. For some time after the party's formation the two figures headed up separate organizations which, while cooperating with each other, maintained their independence from each other. It is difficult to discern exact ideological and political line differences and it appears that the split was fueled by some degree of personal animosity and subjectivism. At any rate, Karmal's faction seems to have stressed a broad national front and a possible "constitutional path." This coincided with the general revisionist line promulgated by the CPSU at the time. Not surprisingly, Karmal was viewed as the more steadfastly pro-Soviet of the two. Taraki was influenced more broadly in his development as a Marxist, in particular by the Indian communist movement. His faction appeared to place greater stress on party organization and gaining a firm base among the workers. In any case, the two factions together, during the 60's and 70's, managed to gain a substantial base within the urban areas among students, intellectuals, workers and portions of the armed forces. However, the PDP's political and organizational presence in the rural areas appears to have remained negligible, a shortcoming the communists would pay for later.

A devastating famine in 1971-72 brought on a political crisis which culminated in 1973, when Mohammed Daoud overthrew the monarchy in Kabul. Both Taraki and Karmal forces supported the move although

Karmal's group was more prominent. While the PDP was not ready to make its own move for power, its support to Daoud was apparently decisive in toppling the old regime. However, the old ruling classes remained intact and quickly reasserted their interests over the early progressive leanings of the Daoud camp. The communists were soon disenfranchised once again and faced increasing government persecution as the years went on.

But during his five year reign, Daoud did nothing to solve the intensifying contradictions in Afghanistan. In fact, the problems worsened. Unemployment mounted and an estimated 1 million Afghans emigrated from the country to look for work. Most of these went to Iran. To shore up the economy and the regime, Daoud encouraged imperialist investment, tying the country more and more to loans from the World Bank, the Shah of Iran, etc. As Taraki was to note subsequently, "The foreign policy of Daoud's regime assumed increasingly the form of dealing, collusion and surrender to imperialism." Meanwhile the left was busy galvanizing the popular opposition.

In 1977, the split in the communist movement was healed and Taraki and Karmal joined forces. Undoubtedly with Soviet encouragement, the party was organizationally reunited, although subsequent events would show the unity achieved to have been quite fragile and superficial.

The political crisis in Afghanistan came to a head early in 1978. Mass demonstrations and strikes were increasingly being organized among the urban populace—especially in Kabul. The radicalized section of the military was beginning to stir openly. The final confrontation was triggered off when a leading communist was assassinated. Fifteen thousand people turned the funeral into a mass protest against Daoud, who responded by arresting Taraki, Karmal and five other opposition leaders.

The left's response to this provocation was the military coup of April 27. The word "coup" here must be explained, however, since it generally suggests some palace intrigue behind the backs of the masses. The action was actually on a very large-scale, led by the dissident army officers who were able to join the growing mass dissatisfaction with a portion of the armed forces. Advanced weapons were used in the assault on the regime.

The fighting that developed at the time was quite heavy with total casualties estimated at somewhere between 2,000 and 10,000 killed and many more injured. Nevertheless, the popular base for this action was still quite limited. Its support came almost solely from the urban masses in a largely peasant, semi-feudal country.

### REFORMS INITIATED BY NEW REGIME

Taraki, whose release from prison was the first political act of the insurrectionists, immediately assumed the presidency of the country. His new government embarked on a program of major reforms designed



to deal with the economic crisis and move the country towards socialism. The state moved to assume more direct responsibility for overseeing the nation's industry, expropriating some and establishing more rigorous regulations for others. Foreign insurance companies and many foreign trade agencies (including the Peugeot franchise) were simply eliminated.

But the most drastic changes were those affecting the countryside. A program of extensive land reform was launched. A seven-acre maximum for land holdings was announced with landless peasants to share in the confiscated estates. Taraki also issued a decree cancelling the loans payable to usurers and revoking mortgages negotiated before 1974 by persons with little or no land.

Clearly these moves were designed to build a popular peasant base for the regime and to weaken the position of the mullahs (most of whom were large landholders) and the landlord class. But it also seems as though the regime was not as capable of carrying out these measures in the countryside as it was of announcing them—particularly in the more remote border regions of the country where access in general is difficult. Revolutionary decrees were obviously no substitute for an armed party structure in the countryside.

At the same time, Taraki moved to eliminate some of the most reactionary vestiges of feudal customs and culture. A new marriage law outlawed the traditional custom of bride-bartering in which a woman was given in marriage by her father in exchange for money or commodities. It also outlawed marriage or engagement for women under the age of 16 and men under the age of 18. Compulsory education for women was instituted for the first time.

These economic and social measures were, naturally, fiercely opposed by the landlords and mullahs. But with the regime's inability to carry out these measures effectively—and likewise with its inability to mount an effective challenge to the hold of feudal and reactionary religious ideology on the rural masses—the reactionaries were in a good position to rally a section of the rural population to a "holy war" (a "jihad") against communism.

"The government of Noor Mohammed Taraki has been pushing ahead with the makings of a Marxist program," noted *The Economist*, the fairly reliable British journal, in February of 1979, "even though this has brought it into direct conflict with Islamic mullahs and their conservative followers . . . whose aims are to get women back into *purdah* and bring Afghanistan's economy and law into line with the dictates of Islam." (*Purdah* is the word denoting the entire system for the exclusion of women from public life.)

But the religious motivations of the mullahs cannot be readily separated from their economic and political concerns. The "dictates of Islam" in so far as the economy was concerned would have effectively

nullified the land reform measures. And the complex feudal family code which prevailed in the countryside, a cornerstone of which was the subordinate role of women, provided an immense source of political authority for the mullahs and landlords. In the absence of an effective force from the central government to carry out and enforce the land reforms, landless peasants were understandably not prepared to risk the perils of defying the local authority of the landlords. When the landlords' power was backed by the prevailing ideology, it represented a powerful force not to be easily dislodged. (This is a telling reconfirmation of the theory that in this era only the proletariat and its party is capable of leading and sustaining the class struggle in the countryside.)

Every revolutionary social transformation gives rise to a counter-revolutionary reaction from those who are dispossessed. In the mangled ideological jargon of capitalism, these counter-revolutionaries are usually cited as "freedom fighters." And to the imperialists they undoubtedly are. The rightwing Cuban terrorists are surely fighting for the freedom of U.S. capital once again to dominate that island nation, just as the "freedom fighters" who licked their chops on Taiwan for more than 20 years yearning to recapture China for Chiang Kai-shek and imperialism were fighting for the freedom of capitalist exploitation.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Afghan counter-revolution should be described in similar terminology these days. The ironic aspect of this designation is underscored, however, when "communists" permit themselves the same freedom to indulge their fantasies. Unfortunately, the class collaborationist essence of "left" opportunism does not seem to flinch at labeling counter-revolution "progressive" so long as it has an anti-Soviet aspect.

But the actual character of this "progressive" counter revolution is becoming more and more difficult to justify. The evidence now is being supplied not by pro-communist or pro-Soviet sources. The bourgeois media itself, possibly unable to hide its underlying ideological premises, is doing this job. A *New York Times* report from Pakistan dated February 8, 1980, offers the following appraisal of the Afghan resistance:

"Land reform attempts undermined their village chiefs. Portraits of Lenin threatened their religious leaders. But it was the Kabul revolutionary government's granting of new rights to women that pushed orthodox Moslem men in the Pashtoon villages of eastern Afghanistan into picking up their guns . . . .

"The government said our women had to attend meetings and our children had to go to schools,' said Shahab Uddin, a 40-year-old farmer who fought and then fled eight months ago. 'This threatens our religion. We had to fight.' . . .

"For the Pashtoon villagers, such notions were deeply offensive. For



the mullahs, the religious leaders, who have traditionally interpreted Islam for their villagers, the reform effort were directly threatening. They urged their followers to fight.

“The government imposed various ordinances allowing women freedom to marry anyone they choose without their parents’ consent,” said the former headmaster who has adopted the fighting name of ‘Zamari’ . . . .

“It was on the first anniversary of the April revolution in which Mr. Taraki came to power that Shinakai village women were asked to attend a meeting at the Khalq party center. ‘The moment the women were invited to the meeting, the fighting started,’ said Zamari. The village men met secretly, he said, and organized an attack.”

Small wonder that the Reuters correspondent in the area would conclude that “The guerrillas are largely Moslem fundamentalists opposed to radical social changes.”

In addition, the counter-revolution clearly had some favorable conditions in which to develop. The new regime’s popular base was not secure in the countryside where the majority of the population lived. Many regions were relatively inaccessible. In two critical border areas—Pakistan in the east and Iran in the west—the counter-revolutionaries had rear bases for both ideological and material support.

There was also an economic base for the development of a counter-revolutionary war. *The Economist* notes (April 21, 1979): “The war inside Afghanistan does seem to be financed increasingly with the proceeds of the illegal opium trade. Feudal Afghan landlords, whose holdings are threatened by the Taraki government, are bringing their poppy crops into Pakistan and using the proceeds to buy arms in the town of Drara . . . . The arms merchants of Drara report that business is

But this was much more than a commercial transaction. The government of Pakistan could not help but be aware of this activity. Its own fears of internal social upheaval were reinforced by the events in Afghanistan (ideas do leap over borders) especially since certain of its national minorities resided in both countries. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Pakistani government was actively involved in supplying the Afghan rebels. It would also appear that China was an important source of the arms and may even have sent military instructors to help train the counter-revolutionary forces. Direct U.S. involvement has been harder to pin down, but the U.S. has not denied that some covert CIA activity was also involved. In short, the new revolutionary government had to face the fact that there existed a substantial material basis for the development of a counter-revolutionary war enjoying widespread and diverse international backing.

Everyone apparently was in the field, staking out their prospects in the Afghanistan situation. Where was the USSR in all of this? Although the

Soviets undoubtedly had foreknowledge of the 1978 revolution, there is no evidence that they took any direct or active role in it. If anything, the USSR has displayed a general reluctance to risk any major alteration in the status quo of this volatile region, so close to its borders. However, despite its caution and hesitation, once the revolution came to power, the USSR moved quickly to assist in the consolidation of power. It did this through substantial economic and military assistance, certainly with an eye towards cementing the new government’s pro-Moscow leanings. Afghanistan had been receiving Soviet assistance for many years prior to the revolution, being in fact, the highest per capita recipient of Soviet aid. Consequently, the new assistance was built upon this foundation. The imperialists knew that the post-1978 Soviet aid had a qualitatively different political significance, but had a difficult time making a big drama out of it in international propaganda. Meanwhile, within six months after the revolution, the Afghans signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR. Forty new economic and trade agreements were signed and Soviet military advisors and equipment arrived to re-organize and bolster the Afghan army.

However, the Soviet’s main attention was rivited on the broader political and military alignments threatening to engulf the Afghan revolution. Their commitment to the Afghan proletariat grew in direct proportion to those who rose up to oppose it. While China and Pakistan’s activities were viewed as mere irritants, the Soviet’s real concern was that the U.S. imperialists were orchestrating the counter-revolution from behind the scenes. When the Iranian revolution broke out—the Soviet course on Afghanistan was set—to defend the revolutionary government in Afghanistan is to defend the vital interests of the USSR. Dare we call this proletarian internationalism without doing serious disservice to the notion?

It would appear that the Taraki government did not firmly grasp the severity of the internal problems and how they intersected with the international contention. The revolution had no sooner triumphed, then the fragile ranks of the communists were further weakened at a time when history presented its most difficult tasks. The split re-emerged in the party within three months, with the Taraki faction gaining dominance. The Karmal faction was broken up and scattered, and its leaders were shipped off to peripheral diplomatic posts. Karmal was sent as ambassador to Czechoslovakia. This was apparently an example of an attempt to settle a pressing political and ideological difference within the party by superficial organizational means. However, what is clear is that no amount of wishful thinking can simplify this inner-party struggle and have it fall neatly into the mold of the international split. The Karmal/Taraki split was not along Moscow/Peking lines. The Afghan Maoists amounted to a couple of small groupings who quite early consolidated a left sectarian stance. Consequently, they never



became a substantial political force in the country compared to the People's Democratic Party. And evidently there was a vast discrepancy between their line and practice; they failed to unfold anything approaching the Chinese model of a people's war in the countryside.

It is a reasonable speculation, in hindsight, that Karmal's faction exercised a somewhat moderating force within the People's Democratic Party. After the Karmal faction was broken up, party policy moved readily into ultra-left errors. The net effects of these policies was to drive the middle forces in the countryside closer to the reactionaries and to leave the party's own natural supporters in the rural areas relatively isolated and with insufficient power. A major portion of the responsibility for the handling of the internal contradictions must be attributed to Hafizullah Amin, the "hard-line" foreign minister of the Taraki government who emerged as the strongman of the regime in April 1979, when he took over the post of prime minister. Amin's response to the internal contradictions was to press even further with the various reform measures and to increasingly rely upon military force when more education and persuasion was called for. This, in turn, gave rise to a great dissatisfaction within the armed forces where junior officers and the rank-and-file became more and more demoralized at the prospect of waging a civil war not just against landlords but also against sections of the rural masses. The characterization of his politics as "ultra-left" seems accurate. They certainly led to increased destabilization of the regime. This must clearly be attributed principally to tactical line errors, since the program itself deserved widespread popular backing. By mid-summer, however, the situation was getting dangerous. A series of purges had weakened the armed forces and, at Amin's command, thousands of political opponents and critics of the regime were needlessly executed.

Moscow, meanwhile, was urging Taraki, who was still the nominal head of state, to take steps to broaden the political base of the government and to adopt a more cautious approach in the unfolding of the various economic and social reforms. Taraki attended the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Havana early in September and stopped off in Moscow on his way home. It was during this meeting that Soviet leaders probably urged Taraki to take a new and more decisive course. They proposed—and Taraki apparently agreed—that Karmal and his associates should be brought back and Amin ousted. It was clear that this could not be arranged peaceably.

But the effort to remove Amin backfired. Somehow the prime minister got wind of the scheme and was able to turn the tables on Taraki. In a subsequent bloody shoot-out, Taraki and his closest followers were killed. Amin assumed absolute control of the country. Karmal wisely decided to stay in Czechoslovakia. Once again a comment from *The*

*Economist* (September 22, 1979) shortly after these events: "Mr. Amin is perhaps the most hated man in the country; he is held responsible for most of the excesses of the communist regime since it came to power."

In the months that followed, the situation went from bad to worse. The rural insurgency grew and, as the possibility of its success loomed on the horizon for the first time, it was more openly fueled by Pakistan and China. The U.S. was sabre-rattling next door before the Ayatollah Khomeini. Amin, increasingly desperate, called for Soviet troops to come in to help stabilize the situation. When they did, Moscow saw no reason to use their presence to maintain Amin in power—especially since his policies were clearly a principal cause of the weakness of the government. Karmal was brought back from Prague (it is not clear exactly when), Amin was eliminated and the Soviet Union took direct responsibility for securing the new regime and bringing the insurgency to heel.

A telling commentary on Amin's three-month reign of terror is offered by a Reuters correspondent from Kabul writing on January 24, 1980—a report made more significant by the fact that during this period the bourgeois media were trying to prevent any possible justification for the Soviet intervention to be registered. "It is generally accepted that the Afghan people were relieved to emerge from the shadow of President Amin, whose three months of iron rule and fierce pursuit of Marxist doctrine alienated all classes of Afghan society. After ousting Noor Mohammed Taraki, the country's first Marxist leader last September, Mr. Amin bewildered the Afghan people with decree after decree that discarded Moslem traditions built up over centuries. Mr. Amin's rigid adherence to Marxist agrarian reform, his drive on illiteracy and his readiness to push through his programs by force met with mounting resistance and stirred up a full-scale insurgency in the country."

In summary, then, we can note that the Afghan revolution launched in April 1978, was in grave danger of being lost almost two years later as the result of three factors:

1. A growing counter-revolutionary movement in the countryside sparked by the resistance of landlords and Islamic fundamentalists to the programs of land reform and social change of the revolution.
2. Increasing support to the insurgency by Pakistan and China.
3. An ultra-left line, particularly developed and pursued by Amin, which was alienating the masses and adding additional fuel to the counter-revolutionaries.

That these contradictions were unfolding in the larger context of U.S. imperialism's deepening crisis in the Middle East—precipitated by the collapse of the Shah of Iran—gives broader significance to the Afghanistan situation. The revolutionary gains of the Afghan masses were in real danger of being reversed; U.S. imperialism would utilize the



reversal to strengthen its position in the area. Only the action of the USSR could realistically check the crisis and reverse the trend by committing enough political and military support on the side of the Afghan revolution. It is an inescapable conclusion that Soviet intervention in Afghanistan objectively constitutes a progressive act and serves the interests of both the Afghan revolution and the world proletariat.

That the obvious concerns of the Soviet government are more bound up with the Soviet state's immediate military security than with any consistent commitment to the revolutionary aspirations of the masses of Afghanistan is a reflection of the revisionist line centered in the CPSU. But the fact that the state interests of the Soviet Union intersect with the revolutionary struggle in Afghanistan speaks to the fact that the fundamental contradiction of our epoch remains that between socialism and capitalism and that this contradiction operates in life independently of the consciousness of those whose actions express it.

As was said at the outset, every revolution has bound up within it, in varying degrees, the principal questions of our historical epoch. The revolution in Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union's role in supporting it, must be measured against those questions.

Is imperialism strengthened or weakened by the forward progress of the revolution in Afghanistan? Is imperialism strengthened or weakened by the intervention of the Soviet Union which has prevented a reactionary counter-revolutionary insurgency from spreading and, most likely, succeeding in its objective of bringing down the still fragile revolutionary power?

As Marxist-Leninists we should not expect the imperialists or their supporters on the "left" to view these questions the same way that we must. Their anguished reactions offer grim testimony to their common ideological outlook calling for a "united front against the USSR." How ironic that those "communists" who launched their polemic against the Soviet Union two decades ago on the ground that the CPSU's revisionist line was leading to class collaboration with U.S. imperialism, now themselves have become the foremost "left" architects of class collaboration!

Nor can we accept the view of those centrists within the Marxist-Leninists movement who stand on the "high ground" of moral absolutism and declaim their fervent support for the revolutionary struggles of the world's peoples in the abstract, but would permit the actual, concrete struggles to be lost because certain actions do not suit their own ideal vision of what should be "permissible" in conducting the class struggle. Political questions and real battles, however, do not come before the communists in their morally pristine form. They come, as always, shaped by the actual workings of history. Their revolutionary

essence must be found beneath the grime and tarnish in which, inevitably, they will be encased. We cannot choose our political questions, taking our stands only on those which do not unduly challenge the ideological prejudices sowed by centuries of capitalism.

Rather, we must be prepared to face the real questions of class struggle as they actually appear in the world, knowing that it is precisely at those junctures when the class enemy unleashes the loudest of his ideological barrages and calls on the hoary cliches of jingoism and national chauvinism that the mettle of the communists, as those who uphold the overall and long term interests of the working class and socialism, is really tested.

Afghanistan is neither the first nor the last such test that the communist movement in the U.S. and the world will face. But it is a critical one precisely because U.S. imperialism has chosen to make it so.





Soviet troops and armor at Kabul  
International Airport

Hubert Vanes/Photo